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From: Cool, Richard
Sent: Monday, July 08, 2013 6:50 AM
To: Carlin, Jayne; Gable, Jill; Gebhardt, Chris
Subject: Emailing: Turbidity study on Kenai River 'languishes' at state level Peninsula Clarion.htm

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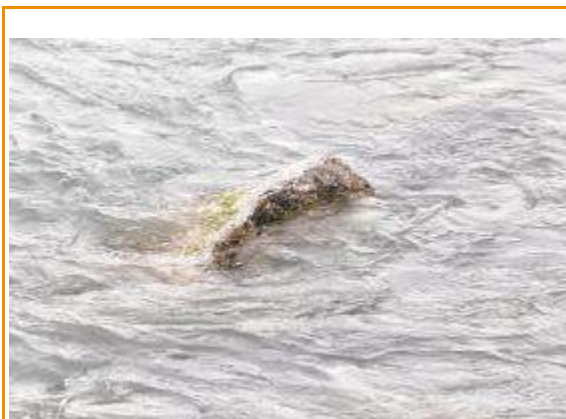
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Turbidity study on Kenai River 'languishes' at state level

Posted: June 30, 2013 - 7:51pm | **Updated:** July 1, 2013 - 9:48am

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Greg Skinner
Low visibility is a sign of "solids" suspended in the water of the Kenai River.

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By [Rashah McChesney](#)

Peninsula Clarion

A 2011 study linking boat traffic to violations of state standards for drinking water, recreational use and health of fish and wildlife on the lower Kenai River has yet to make it through a review process at the state level.

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation has no formal approval process for the three-year study though the data could be used to determine whether the Kenai River should be listed as an "impaired water body" on the state's biennial report to the Environmental Protection Agency on impaired water bodies.

An impaired water body suffers from chronic water quality violations.

The study linked excessive turbidity — a measurement of the amount of light that is scattered as it passed through the water column, the more solids suspended in the water the cloudier it becomes — with boat traffic.

Michelle Bonnet Hale, director of the DEC's division of water, said there was a delay in deciding how the agency would use the data.

“It’s a particularly difficult issue, we want to make sure we’re making the right decision,” Hale said. “It’s a very high priority for the division of water, we know that this one has languished.”

The Kenai Watershed Forum, a Soldotna-based environmental advocacy organization, was commissioned by the DEC to perform the study and submitted it to the state agency in June, 2011.

A peer review of the report was finished one year later and an addendum was added in October 2012 to correct an error.

However, the report was not released to the public and the data was not mentioned in the state’s preliminary 2012 impaired water bodies report despite a petition to the EPA by several hundred community members in the central peninsula seeking an impaired designation for the river.

The federal agency could override the DEC and require an impaired listing for the Kenai River but Hale said she did not think the EPA had made any formal request to do so.

“EPA and DEC have both looked at the data hard and sliced and diced it, that’s part of what we’re doing right now is trying to come to an agreement with the same voice,” she said.

Hale said part of the difficulty was the complexity of the EPA’s impaired water listing rules — defined under the federal Clean Water Act — and how to define as impaired.

“They’re not really well defined,” she said. “If you list a water as impaired, you want to have the definition of that very clear so that you also know how it will be un-listed.”

The DEC protects the Kenai River for turbidity in three categories: drinking, recreation, and fish and wildlife and turbidity levels considered safe for all three uses were exceeded for several hours in July during all three years of the study.

However, the statewide standard requires persistent violations, or more than 10 percent of samples taken exceeding the turbidity criteria, in order for a water body to be considered impaired, according to DEC impaired listing methodology.

Preliminary review of the data suggested that the state’s fish and wildlife turbidity standards had not been exceeded often enough to be considered persistently violated and while few people may not be drinking or recreating in the Kenai River, Stevens said the state is still required to protect for those uses.

As the study was reviewed at the state level, the Kenai Watershed Forum continued to measure turbidity on the river for the last two years through a Kenai Peninsula Borough grant.

“We haven’t really looked at the data and done a statistical analysis that would be part of a complete study in part because we’re really waiting to hear back from (DEC) about what they would like to know more about,” said Robert Ruffner, executive director of the Kenai Watershed Forum. “We would like some guidance based on the work that we’ve given them to date to see if there are outstanding questions that we can make sure that we study to answer or clarify some unknowns.”

Ruffner said the DEC has not been forthcoming with its concerns on the original dataset so the watershed forum plans to study turbidity on the Kenai in July and spend the fall analyzing the data and compiling a report.

“We’ll send them that data, but it’s not — from what we’ve seen — it’s not significantly different than what we’ve submitted to them for the last four or five years,” Ruffner said.

If the watershed forum does not see any response to its data, Ruffner said the organization could consider submitting its data directly to the EPA.

“It is a complicated issue and there are lots of politics associated with anything that changes on the river and I don’t know how to be anymore nice than that ... those are considerations that they have to make,” Ruffner said. “But at some point they need to make a decision on this issue, whether it warrants further attention or not and so far all I’ve see is the desire to put off that decision.”

Rashah McChesney can be reached at rashah.mcchesney@peninsulaclarion.com

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beaverlooper 07/01/13 - 11:09 am

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[row only](#)

The Kenai river needs to be a row only fishery for more reasons than one.



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Roger104 07/02/13 - 11:45 am

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[Where Is Kenai River Sportsfishing Association?](#)

I can't help but wonder where the nonprofit "Dedicated to ensuring the sustainability" of the Kenai is on this issue. Oh, that's right, they have pulled support for the Kenai Watershed forum and functions that benefit it like the Kenai River Festival. Seems that with info like this, they would be leading the charge for some changes on our river.

It's frustrating that this report and the info contained in it was held up by bureaucratic red tape for years because those with the right political connections don't want it to see the light of day. Kind of makes a person wonder how many other Kenai River habitat-related issues are being swept under the rug.

Why is it we are spending millions of dollars on a KRSA-inspired study tracking Kenai Kings in the inlet to find out where 13% of them get caught in setnets, but we can't spend a little money studying and protecting where 100% of them spawn and grow?



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rwhobby 07/02/13 - 05:39 pm

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[Make Kenai river drift boat only](#)

It's time to make the Kenai river drift boat only, it will help the river system greatly. It will stop bank erosion, hydrocarbon problem and it will take the pressure off, due to less boats on the river.



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Alaskaborn 07/02/13 - 06:56 pm

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[Hydrocarbons?](#)

Hydrocarbons are no longer an issue on the Kenai River since 2 strokes were banned in July. DNR even went overboard and banned them year round even though no other month exceeded EPA water quality standards. If you want to change the nature of the Kenai fishery, go ahead and build the infrastructure to facilitate a drift only fishery. Just do it for the right reasons and don't blame hydrocarbons. Turbidity is also another scapegoat. Make it drift boat because that is the type of river you want.



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smithtb 07/02/13 - 08:39 pm

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[Right...?](#)

Sure, because there NO hydrocarbons in the Kenai, and boat wakes don't cause bank erosion and turbidity. Besides, hydrocarbons, bank erosion and turbidity do not affect juvenile salmon at all.... In fact, lets put bigger motors on the boats, cause that will help everything.

LOOK! OUT THERE IN THE SALTWATER!!!



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Rodney

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rwhobby 07/03/13 - 07:18 am

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[Hydrocarbon](#)

The hydrocarbon problem on the Kenai river has improved, but it's still a problem. In the month of July not everyday meets the clean water act. With the cleaner and more fuel Efficient boat motors still have hydrocarbon going down the river. Before the motor regulation there was 200 gallons of gas going down the river every day, now it's between 50 to 70 gallons, so the hydrocarbon problem is not fixed.



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kenai123 07/03/13 - 08:25 pm

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[A row only set net fishery](#)

Cook Inlet commercial set net fishery needs to be a row only fishery for more reasons than one.



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kenai123 07/04/13 - 06:54 pm

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[Commercial fishing is the problem, not muddy river water.](#)

This turbidity study on Kenai River 'languishes' at the state level within bureaucratic red tape because it is one of the dumbest issues generate to date by our commercial fishing industry. The watershed forum is only addressing this because commercial fisheries will do anything to stop the public from getting their fish without paying them at Fred Meyer.

If the Kenai River has a turbidity problem then half the rivers in Alaska have the same problem and most have higher glacial turbidity than the Kenai. This is an outrageous issue but has been published by the Clarion as being legitimate. The commercial fishing industry will do ANYTHNG to attempt to prevent public fisheries from catching their own fish. First it was "oh they are trampling the grass" then " oh we saw a drop of oil in the river" since none of that worked to force the public to buy fish from Fred Meyers, now they go with muddy water! I wonder why they are not concerned with the other fifty muddy rivers in Alaska? Do they know that muddy water is normal in Alaska? Our rivers have been pumping out muddy water for centuries without destroying our fisheries. Some of our commercial fisheries have destroyed our fisheries as soon as they started. So here we are seeing commercial fisheries pointing at ANYTHING else to keep us from looking at them.



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smithtb 07/04/13 - 01:37 pm

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[What a kind, respectful person you are.](#)

123,

It's great to know that you have so much respect for the resource you have harvested for a living, and for the community and residents that have supported your COMMERCIAL FISHguideING business. Glad to know you want all of the fisheries that support our community to thrive.

I'm glad to see that you support a diverse and healthy fishery, and a healthy river habitat. After all, it is where our Kings spawn and grow, in case you didn't know.

I bet all the local residents who quit fishing the river because it was overcrowded are glad to see that they left it to the likes of you.

LOOK! OUT THERE IN THE SALTWATER!!!



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Alaskaborn 07/04/13 - 05:02 pm

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[rvhobby](#)

Since four stroke motors were mandated in the Kenai, there has not been a single sample that has exceeded the statewide water quality standards.



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kenai123 07/04/13 - 07:28 pm

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[smithth - Set gill nets generate unacceptable collateral damage](#)

Our community does not thrive because of diverse fisheries.

If diversity were the point why don't we have a user group which only uses TNT to blast fish to the surface? We don't use explosives for the same reason we should not be using set gill nets. Some fisheries gear types may function to harvest fish but they are so damaging to the environment surrounding them that they are unacceptable. This gear type is set gill nets and they generate unacceptable levels of collateral damage. Are you getting it? Set gill nets generate unacceptable levels of fisheries collateral damage.

It does not matter if set gill net provide a diverse fishery, they generate unacceptable collateral damage. Our community cannot thrive with one fishery generating so much collateral damage that it destroys another fishery. Do not inform us that we cannot live without set gill nets because we can. We can live without explosive fishing, we can live without fish trap fishing, we can live without electrification fishing, we can live without it all and that living has nothing to do with a diversified fishery or community. It actually has a lot to do with common sense fisheries management.

There is nothing healthy about destroying king salmon runs in order to harvest red salmon. You can tell all those local residents who you claim quit fishing the river, that now is the time to return to the river because it is a complete wasteland of non-fishing on the river now. You can drive from the Soldotna bridge to the Beaver Creek with your eyes closed and never hit another boat or fish for that matter. So much for your pathetic non-truth overcrowding claims...

Everything you list is either completely false or partly false. It is a small wonder we have any thing at all living in our waters with folks like this dragging gill nets through those same waters. Gees, maybe, just maybe that is why our fisheries are soooooo messed up....



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kenai123 07/04/13 - 08:03 pm

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[turbidity study on Kenai River?](#)

The turbidity study on Kenai River is such a joke. The issue depends completely on the viewers politics and you can spin the turbidity issue any direction you wish to use it to push your personal and financial politics. The Yukon River has much higher turbidity than the Kenai River and it supports more fisheries than the Kenai River. It has been doing this for centuries much like other rivers in Alaska and all of these rivers have salmon runs which flourish. So you wonder why the Kenai River Turbidity Study 'languishes' at the state level within bureaucratic red tape? It is because this non-issue is a political joke which is being used to push political and financial issues. Do you enjoy political spin? Well this is the issue for you. Muddy water hurts the Kenai but not the Yukon, Killey or Matanuska bla, bla, bla... The fish get along fine in this water the trouble is that humans can't seem to figure out how to do the same. This is nothing but political mud slinging spin.



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robertwhite

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robert white 07/05/13 - 02:46 am

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[turbidity on the kenai](#)

Put the largest user group in drift boats only. If you go drift only, for everyone, your going to kill property values along the river and the loss of borough taxes means it has to be made up somewhere..



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beaverlooper 07/05/13 - 09:39 am

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[Quiet](#)

Would it be the lack of engine noise and the peace and quiet that makes prices go down? What a load of crap.



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robertwhite

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robert white 07/06/13 - 03:41 am

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[kenai river](#)

Do we really need 500 guides on the kenai?

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